

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 6856

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SUBJ: THE EMERGING POLITICAL PARTY STRUCTURE IN THAILAND

REF: A. BANGKOK 3928 B. BANGKOK 5783 C. BANGKOK 6597

D. BANGKOK A-115 E. BANGKOK 4735

SUMMARY: WHILE THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY CONSIDERS A NEW POLITICAL PARTY BILL, POLITICAL GROUPINGS ARE ORGANIZING AND PREPARING FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS. IDENTIFIABLE GROUPS INCLUDE EX-UTPP MEMBERS, THE DEMOCRAT PARTY, THE SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT, AND THE NEW FORCE (PALANG MAI). MANY MINOR GROUPS ARE ALSO POPPING UP. AS THINGS NOW STAND, OUTCOME WILL PROBABLY BE A MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM AND A COALITION GOVERNMENT AFTER THE ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (NLA) PASSED THE FIRST READING OF THE POLITICAL PARTY BILL APRIL 19. THE BILL WILL NOW GO TO COMMITTEE FOR POSSIBLE AMENDMENT BEFORE A SECOND READING WHICH MUST TAKE PLACE WITHIN FIFTEEN DAYS. THE BILL, WHEN THE NLA FINALLY PASSES IT, WILL ABROGATE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY ANNOUNCEMENT NO. 9 WHICH BANNED THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES.

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2. DESPITE THEIR LACK OF LEGAL STATUS, POLITICAL

GROUPINGS ARE BUSILY ORGANIZING, SELECTING CANDIDATES, AND PREPARING FOR ELECTIONS. ALTHOUGH THE EMERGING POLITICAL PARTY STRUCTURE IS ONLY SLIGHTLY CLEARER THAN IT WAS IN EARLY MARCH (REFTEL A), SEVERAL MAJOR POLITICAL GROUPINGS ARE BECOMING DISCERNIBLE AND MANY MINOR ONES KEEP POPPING UP.

THE FORMER GOVERNMENT PARTY

3. FORMER MEMBERS OF THE UNITED THAI PEOPLE'S PARTY (UTPP) HAVE HELD MEETINGS IN THE NORTHEAST (REFTEL B) AND THE NORTH (REFTEL C) TO ORGANIZE A NEW PARTY AND TO SELECT CANDIDATES. THEY WILL HOLD ADDITIONAL MEETINGS IN THE SOUTH AND IN BANGKOK. THEY BELIEVE THAT THAWIT KLINPRATHUM'S FREE NATION (SERI RATH) GROUP WILL EVENTUALLY JOIN THEIR PARTY.

4. THE EX-UTPP GROUP HAS AS YET NO NAME AND NO LEADER. IT ALSO HAS NO IDEOLOGY, EXCEPT AN AVERSION TO EXTREMES OF LEFT OR RIGHT. IT SHARES A DESIRE TO RETURN TO POWER, AND IT CLAIMS TO HAVE SUBSTANTIAL FINANCIAL BACKING.

5. THE EX-UTPP GROUP HAS AT PRESENT THE BEST ORGANIZATION OUTSIDE BANGKOK AND THE BEST FINANCIAL RESOURCES OF ANY POTENTIAL POLITICAL PARTY. IF IT HOPES TO DOMINATE THE NEXT GOVERNMENT, IT WILL ALSO NEED A LEADER OF NATIONAL STATURE. PROMINENT PERSONS SUCH AS THANAT KHOMAN, PRASERT RUCHIRAWONG, CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN, SUKIT NIMMANHEMIN, AND SANGA KITTIKACHON HAVE RECEIVED MENTION AS POSSIBLE LEADERS OF THE NEW PARTY, BUT NONE HAVE PUBLICLY INDICATED A WILLINGNESS TO LEAD IT. DEFENSE MINISTER THAWI CHUNLASAP IS CLOSE TO THE PARTY ORGANIZERS AND WOULD BE A LOGICAL LEADER, IF ELECTIONS TAKE PLACE AFTER HIS RETIREMENT ON 30 SEPTEMBER 1974. SANGA RECEIVED AN INVITATION TO THE MEETING IN CHIANG MAI BUT DID NOT ATTEND.

THE DEMOCRAT PARTY

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6. THE DEMOCRAT PARTY UNDER SENI PRAMOT IS ALSO ORGANIZING AND RECRUITING CANDIDATES IN THE PROVINCES, BUT ITS MAJOR STRENGTH REMAINS IN BANGKOK AND THE SOUTH. IT IS WEAKEST IN CENTRAL THAILAND (EXCLUSIVE OF BANGKOK) AND IN THE NORTHEAST. THE DEMOCRATS ARE ALSO BESET BY FACTIONALISM. BEKHA APHAIWONG, WIDOW OF PARTY FOUNDER KHUANG APHAIWONG, RESIGNED FROM HER POST ON THE PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE IN EARLY APRIL CLAIMING THAT THE

PARTY LEADERSHIP WAS IGNORING HER. SHE REMAINS A MEMBER OF THE PARTY, HOWEVER. NOR HAVE DISSIDENT DEMOCRATS THA-NGAI SINWANTHAT AND CHUMPHON MANINET SUCCEEDED IN ATTRACTING SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF PARTY MEMBERS TO THEIR REBEL FACTIONS.

THE SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT

7. NINE LEFT-OF-CENTER POLITICAL GROUPS MERGED INTO A NEW GROUP CALLING ITSELF THE SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT (SUF) IN LATE MARCH. ORGANIZERS OF THE NEW GROUP INCLUDED THEP CHOTINUCHIT, FORMER LEADER OF THE ECONOMIC UNITED FRONT; LIANG CHAIYAKUN, FORMER LEADER OF THE PEOPLE'S PARTY; PAITHUN KHRUKAEO, FORMER LEADER OF THE DEMOCRATIC FRONT PARTY; AND CHUA THANPAEO, FORMER LEADER OF THE LABOR PARTY. COLONEL SOMKIT SISANGKHOM, LEADER OF THE FORMER SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY, HAS REFUSED TO JOIN THE SUF, ALTHOUGH NEWSPAPERS HAVE ASSOCIATED HIM WITH THE NEW GROUP.

8. THE SUF HAS BEEN LEADERLESS SINCE THEP'S DEATH APRIL 7, BUT FORMER ECONOMIC UNITED FRONT SECRETARY-GENERAL KHLAEO NORAPATI HAS BEEN ACTING UNOFFICIALLY AS SUF SPOKESMAN. THE SUF WILL HOLD
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THE NEW FORCE

9. A GROUP OF INTELLECTUALS HAVE FORMED A POLITICAL GROUP CALLING ITSELF THE NEW FORCE (PALANG MAI) WHICH WILL BECOME A POLITICAL PARTY AFTER PASSAGE OF THE POLITICAL PARTY BILL. THE NEW FORCE IS IDENTICAL WITH

THE MORALITY AND FREEDOM (SERI THAM) OR PEOPLE'S MORALITY (PRACHATHAM) GROUP WHICH WE REPORTED IN REFTEL A. THE NEW NAME IS DESIGNED TO SET THE GROUP APART FROM THE OLD FORCES RUNNING THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MILITARY.

10. ORGANIZERS OF THE NEW FORCE INCLUDE THAMMASAT PROFESSORS PRAMOT NAKONTHAP, CHAI-ANAN SAMUTWANIT, AND OUAI MISUK. AFTER FAILING TO GET DR. PUAI UNGPHAKON TO ACCEPT LEADERSHIP OF THE GROUP, THE NEW FORCE HAS SETTLED ON MAGSAYSAY AWARD WINNER DR. KRASAE CHANAWONG AS ITS FUTURE PARTY LEADER. THE GROUP'S ATTEMPTS AT POLITICAL ORGANIZATION ON A NATIONAL LEVEL HAVE TO DATE BEEN AMATEURISH AND NAIVE. KRASAE'S PUBLIC ADVOCACY OF VASECTOMIES IS UNLIKELY TO WIN HIM MUCH MALE VOTER SUPPORT.

THE GROUP OF 99

11. THE LARGEST AND MOST INFLUENTIAL POLITICAL GROUP IN
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THE PRESENT NLA IS THE GROUP OF 99 WHICH KASEM CHATIKAWANIT LEADS (REF D). KASEM'S EFFICIENT AND HONEST MANAGER OF LABOR AND CAPITAL. HE IS QUOTED IN THE LOCAL PRESS AS SAYING THAT THE GROUP OF 99 WILL DEFINITELY NOT BECOME A POLITICAL PARTY. GIVEN THE GROUP'S DISPARATE MEMBERSHIP, IT WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTY CONVERTING INTO ONE. NEVERTHELESS, MANY MEMBERS OF THE GROUP, MOSTLY TECHNOCRATS, HAVE ACQUIRED POLITICAL EXPERIENCE AND AMBITIONS IN RECENT MONTHS AND WILL BE LOOKING FOR A POLITICAL HOME DURING THE COMING ELECTIONS. SOME WILL JOIN ONE OR ANOTHER OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES MENTIONED ABOVE. OTHERS MAY TRY TO FORM SMALLER PARTIES OF THEIR OWN.

SMALLER POLITICAL GROUPS

12. THE LOCAL PRESS REPORTS ALMOST DAILY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW GROUP WHICH PLANS TO FORM A POLITICAL PARTY. TYPICAL OF THESE IS A GROUP OF THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY ECONOMICS STUDENTS WHO ANNOUNCED APRIL 14 THE FORMATION OF THE "HOLY SOCIO-DEMOCRATIC PARTY," WHICH WILL PROMOTE THE "GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS" AND WILL INVITE EITHER DR. PUAI OR ARMY COMMANDER GEN. KRIT SIWARA TO BE ITS LEADER. NONE OF THESE PARTIES WILL BE A SERIOUS FACTOR IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS, BUT THEY CLUTTER UP THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, AND SOME MAY WIN A SEAT OR TWO IN THE NEXT PARLIAMENT.

CONCLUSIONS

13. THE EMERGING POLITICAL PARTY STRUCTURE IN THAILAND IS THUS A MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM. THE DRAFT POLITICAL PARTY

BILL (REFTEL E) ENCOURAGES SUCH A SYSTEM, SINCE IT PERMITS ANY GROUP WITH 1000 MEMBERS TO FORM A PARTY. THE PARTIES THAT ARE EMERGING ARE LOOSELY ORGANIZED AROUND A FEW PROMINENT PERSONALITIES. THEY HAVE LITTLE IDEOLOGICAL COHESION. THIS TYPE OF ORGANIZATION IS NATURAL, SINCE THE CANDIDATE'S PERSONALITY AND THE AMOUNT OF MONEY HE SPENDS IN THE LOCALITY HAVE ALWAYS INFLUENCED THAI VOTERS MORE THAN PARTY PROGRAMS OR IDEALS HAVE.

14. IF ALL THE FORMER UTPP POLITICIANS CAN UNITE UNDER A
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SINGLE POLITICAL ROOF, THEY STAND THE BEST CHANCE OF CAPTURING CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT AFTER THE ELECTIONS. THE MOST LIKELY PROSPECT, HOWEVER, AT THIS EARLY DATE IS THAT NO SINGLE PARTY WILL WIN A MAJORITY OF SEATS IN THE NEXT PARLIAMENT. A COALITION OR MINORITY GOVERNMENT WOULD THEN BE NECESSARY. SINCE THAI PARTIES ARE NOT IDEOLOGICALLY BASED, IT WILL BE RELATIVELY EASY FOR THEM TO BECOME POLITICAL BEDFELLOWS. POLITICAL JOCKEYING AFTER THE ELECTIONS SHOULD BE AT LEAST AS INTENSE AS BEFORE.
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